

## VOICE AND TONE

### When writing, the City of Grand Rapids is:

- **Familiar** — easy to talk to; personal; creating a sense of belonging
- **Vibrant** — full of energy and enthusiasm; vital, diverse, proud, joyful
- **Straightforward** — direct, honest, and sincere
- **Helpful** — confident, accessible, supportive, and caring
- **Forward-thinking** — idealistic yet practical; outcome-focused, driven, and creative

### 8 questions to ask about your content:

1. Would this put me at ease?
2. Do I sound like someone I'd want to talk to?
3. Does this hold my attention (or do I get bored)?
4. Is the purpose of this content obvious?
5. Is there a simpler way of saying this?
6. Does this provide value to my audience?
7. Is this easy to understand?
8. Would this make me feel more confident?

### 9 tips for writing in the City's voice:

1. Write in the first person (e.g., “we”) and address your audience directly (e.g., “you”).
2. Use active voice and strong, precise action verbs.
3. Vary your sentence and paragraph length and avoid dense blocks of text.
4. Choose simple words whenever possible and use common, conversational language (aim for a readability score of grade 9 or less).
5. Lead with your best material and get right to the point.
6. Listen for the real question and answer directly, without giving unneeded additional information.
7. Focus on what people care about—what's in it for them—and avoid talking about yourself.
8. Write with an emphasis on the benefits and outcomes instead of dwelling on the problems or the process.
9. Keep your audience and their situation in mind (this is where the tone comes in). Consider what they're thinking and feeling and meet them where they are—then guide them toward how you want them to feel after reading your words.